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AUTHOR Reeb, Richard
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ABSTRACT

In 1976, a study determined that student retention had increased markedly following Barstow College's transition from a semester to a quarter system. In 1979, another study was conducted to determine: (1) the accuracy of the 1976 figures; (2) the effect of the shortness of the time period considered in the 1976 study on its reliability; (3) the effect of the asymmetry of the enrollment figures with average daily attendance figures in the 1976 two-year comparison; (4) the completion rates in subsequent years; (5) the effects of the quarter schedule on completion rates in high enrollment courses; and (6) the effects on carry-through enrollments in sequence courses. The study reached the conclusion that the figures in the 1976 report were probably not accurate, due to the facts that completely comparable information on completions did not exist, that one year under each calendar was insufficient for comparison purposes, and that inexactness in record-keeping under both calendars rendered all conclusions in both studies somewhat tenuous. The 1979 study also concluded that: the completion rates since the transition to the quarter calendar remained fairly consistent; the completion rates in English composition and United States history classes (high enrollment courses) were similar under both calendars; and that sequence courses suffered some enrollment declines in the quarter calendar. (AYC)

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ACADEMIC CALENDARS AND STUDENT RETENTION

An Ambiguous Relationship

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Dr. Richard Reeb

August 23, 1979

JC 790 536

August 23, 1979

TO: Cabinet

FROM: Dr. Richard Reeb

SUBJECT: Academic Calendars and Student Retention: An Ambiguous Relationship

One of the key issues concerning a college's choice of academic calendar is the effect of a given calendar on student retention. It was concluded in a 1976 study by Ken Mack, then of Research and Development (now defunct), that student retention had increased markedly following Barstow College's transition from a semester to a quarter calendar. According to the report, the percentage of students completing courses increased from 68% to 88%---a gain of 20%. That is, in the last year of the semester calendar, 1970-71, initial or total enrollments of 11,903 fell by 3,850 to 8,053; but in the first year of the quarter calendar, 1971-72, initial enrollments of 10,619 fell by only 1,280 to 9,339. While suggesting four possible explanations for this difference, the study concluded: "There was a significant increase in student completions in the first year of the quarter calendar as opposed to the last year of the semester calendar."

The college did not change to the quarter calendar simply because of the expectation that student completion rates would be higher than they were with the semester calendar. Educational benefits to students, as well as financial benefits for the college, were sought in this transition. As recently as last year, Dean Robert Chamberlin of Student Services summed up the issue in a January, 1978 memo to the certificated staff: "The decision [about which calendar to adopt] should be based primarily upon whether students attend better and ... 'learn better' on one system than on another." This researcher has found no evidence that is adequate to call the earlier findings into essential question. There are a number of qualifications, however, about calendar studies at Barstow College that do need to be considered. They are:

1. the accuracy of the R & D figures;
2. the difficulty in obtaining complete enrollment information before the 1971-72 academic year;
3. the shortness of the time period considered by R & D in its study;
4. the asymmetry of the enrollment figures with ADA figures for the two-year comparison period;
5. the completion rates in subsequent years;
6. the effects on completion rates in high enrollment courses;
7. the effects on carry-through enrollments in sequence courses.

COMPLETION RATES

First, the enrollment figures for 1971-72 given in the 1976 R & D report are lower than those obtained by this researcher. Using the grade distribution

sheets available through the data processing system (used for the first time in 1971-72) this researcher got total enrollments of 11,122 or 503 higher than the R & D study, and completions of 9,647 or 308 higher. The effect on the percentages is not great. The new figure is 86.7% or 1.3% lower than the R & D study. But given the large numbers of enrollments and numerous possibilities for human error, a discrepancy between two researchers is understandable.

ENROLLMENTS, ADA ASYMMETRY

The next problem is more serious. As indicated above, there was no data processing system in operation before 1971-72. If, therefore, a researcher wished to determine the enrollment and completions before that time, he could not rely upon such a system, but needed to go through each and every grade list. Student help was reportedly used by the R & D researcher for this purpose, and we could have duplicated the effort now. However, one year for each calendar is a rather short period of time to evaluate the effect on completion rates, and two more years, say, for a fuller comparison would be an almost intolerable burden.

I have attempted to compensate somewhat for the short time period during the years of the quarter calendar by obtaining as much information as possible through the grade distribution sheets. This I have obtained with the exception of Fall, 1975, Winter, 1976, and Winter and Spring of 1979.

COMPLETION RATES IN CLASSES AT BARSTOW COLLEGE, 1971-79*

Term	Total Enrollment	Final Enrollment	Completion Rate
Fall, 1971	3,587	3,173	88.5%
Winter, 1972	3,885	3,284	84.3%
Spring, 1972	3,650	3,190	87.4%
Totals	11,122	9,647	86.7%
Fall, 1972	3,952	3,401	86.1%
Winter, 1973	3,859	3,100	80.3%
Spring, 1973	3,594	2,661	74.0%
Totals	11,405	9,152	80.3%
Fall, 1973	4,351	3,857	88.6%
Winter, 1974	3,821	3,379	88.4%
Spring, 1974	3,794	3,331	87.8%
Totals	11,966	10,567	88.3%
Fall, 1974	4,035	3,101	76.9%
Winter, 1975	4,578**	4,028	88.0%
Spring, 1975	4,459	3,527	79.1%
Totals	13,072	10,656	81.5%
Fall, 1975	Not available		
Winter, 1976	" "		
Spring, 1976 Incomplete	4,234	3,627	85.7%
Fall, 1976	4,549	3,705	81.5%
Winter, 1977	4,149	3,628	87.4%
Spring, 1977	3,894	3,216	82.6%
Totals	12,592	10,549	83.8%
Fall, 1977	4,980	4,017	80.7%
Winter, 1978	4,152	3,608	86.9%
Spring, 1978	3,844	3,298	87.5%
Totals	12,975	10,923	84.2%
Fall, 1978	3,953	3,249	82.2%
Winter, 1979	Not available		
Spring, 1979 Incomplete	" "		

*As there is no camparable record for completion for those years prior to the introduction of the data processing system (coincident with the adoption of the quarter calendar and the ABC-NC grading system), there is little basis for asserting that the adoption of the quarter system had any effect on the completion rate at Barstow College.

**Includes adds after first census.

For the years for which completion information is available, there is a completion rate consistently in the 80 to 85% range. The significance of these findings, however, is not obvious until we have comparable figures for the years under the semester calendar, and these we do not have. One fact, however, is relevant. The ADA for 1971-72 was 3.2% higher than for 1970-71 (729.03 and 706.32--a difference of 22.71 ADA), yet the total and final enrollments decreased during those years. The former fell by 1,284 from 11,903 to 10,609, and the latter fell by 1,286 from 9,339 to 8,053. It is certainly possible for full-time enrollments to drop in the face of rising enrollments, but, if so, ADA should drop also. But it did not. In other words, the enrollments for 1971-72 should be somewhat higher than those for 1970-71, inasmuch as the ADA increased by 3.2%.

AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE FIGURES FOR BARSTOW COLLEGE, 1960-1979

Year	ADA	Defined Adult	Deviation	Percentage
1960-61	277.40	53.31		
1961-62	343.00	174.17	65.60	23.6%
1962-63	329.29	152.01	-13.76	-4.0%
1963-64	370.52	172.39	41.23	12.5%
1964-65	376.34	120.74	5.82	1.6%
1965-66	370.04	110.03	-6.30	-1.7%
1966-67	448.79	109.43	78.75	21.3%
1967-68	583.91	158.10	135.12	30.1%
1968-69	615.00	99.00	31.09	5.3%
1969-70	656.03	146.93	41.03	6.7%
1970-71	706.32	149.68	50.29	7.7%
1971-72	729.03	132.82	22.71	3.2%
1972-73	759.98	166.55	30.95	4.2%
1973-74	809.30	133.69	49.32	6.5%
1974-75	995.36	173.46	185.06	18.6%
1975-76	1,110.47	207.69*	115.11	11.6%
1976-77	1,083.24		-27.47	-2.5%
1977-78	1,014.72		-68.52	-6.3%
1978-79	951.10		-63.62	-6.3%

*Last year of Defined Adult Category.

Summary: The average rate of growth in ADA was higher under the semester calendar than under the quarter calendar, whether we consider the issue in raw figures or percentages; an annual average of 42.89 and 10.3% compared to 30.44 and 3.6%. While the quarter calendar has witnessed more dramatic increases, it has also seen more dramatic decreases than the semester calendar. Thus, increases of 185 and 115.1 ADA are to be found since 1971 (year of transition to quarter calendar), but so are decreases of 27.5, 68.5 and 63.6 ADA. The semester calendar saw only one dramatic increase--135.1; but only two decreases of 13,8 and 6.3. The quarter calendar has not retarded growth, however, as the annual ADA figures are higher, both absolutely and on the average, than those under the semester calendar. That is, the average ADA under the semester calendar was 50.266, compared to 931.65 under the quarter calendar. The difference in base (277.4 vs 706.32) for each calendar helps to explain why the semester calendar has seen growth of 428.92 ADA (154.6%) from 1961 to 1971, while the quarter calendar has seen growth of only 222.07 ADA (30.5%) from 1972 to 1979. At the same time, we should point out that while the quarter calendar has probably not retarded growth, it has not prevented a sharp decrease of ADA (159.37 or 14.4%) from 1976 to 1979. The increase in ADA for 1970-71 to 1971-72 was 22.7 or 3.2%. Thus, there was no immediate significant effect on ADA by conversion from the semester to the quarter calendar.

DIFFERENT REPORTING SYSTEMS

Next, one must remark on the essential incommensurability of the data generated by different attendance reporting systems. While both calendars had a purging period of approximately three weeks' duration, the difference in the length of the terms is significant. That is, three weeks out of eighteen represents one-sixth of the term, but three weeks out of twelve represents one-fourth of the term--a difference of one-twelfth or a ratio of three to two. In other words, students have the equivalent of an extra week and a half in which to drop classes in the quarter calendar over students in the semester calendar. It would be as if students now could drop without being recorded as enrolled for four and one-half (semester) weeks. There is no way of determining how many more students were not purged before census under the semester calendar than under the quarter calendar. But to the extent they were not eliminated from class lists in the comparatively short purge period, they increased the total enrollments for each term and year, providing a higher base than that provided by the three-week purge period under the quarter calendar. Now, the higher the total enrollments (the final enrollment being the same), the lower the completion rate. By the same reasoning, the proportionately longer purge period under the quarter system serves to decrease initial or total enrollments and thereby increase the completion rate.

Nevertheless, the overall completion rates continued to be high for the next two years, with 80.3% (9,647 of 11, 122) in 1972-73, and 88.3% (10,567 of 11,966) in 1973-74. Although records for the 1976-77 and 1978-79 academic years are not complete, in the remaining years for which figures are available (1974-75, 1976-77, 1977-78) the completion rate did not drop below 80%, although rates of less than this have been recorded in three quarters (Spring, 1973, 74%; Fall, 1974, 76.9%; and Spring, 1975, 79.1%).

ENGLISH AND HISTORY COMPLETIONS

Given the difficulties of obtaining the enrollment figures for semester calendar years (and the debatable significance of figures for quarter calendar years in the absence of comparable data from the semester calendar), this researcher tried a different approach. There are two aspects to this approach First, a comparison of required, high-enrollment courses was made for three years under each calendar. Second, comparisons were made of sequence courses under each calendar with reference to enrollments over entire sequences.

Chosen for the first study were American History and English Composition. Specifically, History 17A, first semester of a year-long sequence in the semester calendar, was compared with History 17, the same course under the quarter calendar (no longer part of a sequence); and English 1A, the first semester of a year-long sequence under the semester calendar, was compared with English 1A, the same course under the quarter calendar. Once known as Communications 1 (during 1971-72), it, once again, became part of a year-long (but three quarter) sequence. These courses were chosen as representative of trends in the college as a whole. They constitute a large statistical sampling, and are inclusive, therefore, of a significant cross section of the entire student body.

COMPLETION RATES FOR ENGLISH 1A AND HISTORY 17A CLASSES IN SEMESTER AND QUARTER CALENDARS, 1968-1973, COMPARED

Semester	1968-69			1969-70			1970-71			Totals		
	Initial	Final	Rate	Initial	Final	Rate	Initial	Final	Rate	Initial	Final	Rate
English 1A	185	126	68.1%	271	235	86.7%	358	243	86.7%	814	604	74.2%
History 17A	188	153	81.4%	344	191	55.5%	482	243	50.4%	890	537	67.0%
Totals	373	279	74.8%	615	426	69.3%	840	486	57.3%	1,704	1,141	67.0%

Quarter	1971-72			1972-73			1973-74			Totals		
	Initial	Final	Rate	Initial	Final	Rate	Initial	Final	Rate	Initial	Final	Rate
English 1A	221	179	81.0%	175	133	76.0%	259	188	72.6%	655	500	76.3%
History 17A	453	403	89.0%	282	215	76.2%	345	266	77.1%	1,080	884	81.9%
Totals	674	582	86.4%	457	348	76.1%	604	454	75.2%	1,735	1,384	79.8%

Observations: Completion rates in English 1A over both three-year periods are fairly close overall with 74.2% in the 1968-71 group and 76.3% in the 1971-74 group, an increase of only 2.1%. There is a significant difference in the History 17A completion rates, with 60.3% in the semester group and 81.9% in the quarter group, an increase of 21.6%. However, English 1A fell to 72.6% by the 1973-74 year, while History 17A reached a high of 81.4% in 1968-69. Each calendar period saw a decline over the three-year period, from 74.8% for both classes in 1968-69 to 67.0% in 1970-71; and from 86.4% in 1971-72 to 79.8% in 1973-74. The high completion rate achieved in History 17A in 1971-72 of 89.1% was the highest of any of the six years surveyed, while the low for History 17A of 55.5% in 1969-70 was the lowest of any. The increases during the quarter period were achieved even with slightly higher enrollments than during the semester period, 1735 to 1704. The completion rate attained by English 1A classes in 1969-70 was the highest of any such classes during the six-year period.

So, while there are no incomparable enrollments records for the years prior to 1971-72, we do have available the English and History class list for all those years. We compared completion rates by comparing History 17A and English 1A classes for three years under each calendar. While an examination of the grade distribution sheets generated by Data Processing sufficed to reveal the information for the years 1971-1973, a hand count was required for the years 1968-71. This comparison showed that while, on the whole, the completion rate appeared to be higher during the quarter years (79.8% to 67.0%), the rates during the semester years did compare favorably with those since 1971 on an individual basis. That is, the highest year recorded was for History 17A in 1971-72 with an 89% completion rate. But the second highest rate was achieved by English 1A in 1969-70 with 86.7%. Otherwise, the combined annual rates for English 1A and History 17A during the 1968-71 period were 74.8%, 69.3% and 57.9%, respectively. The combined rates during the 1971-73 period were 86.4%, 76.1% and 75.2%.

Interestingly, completion rates declined over both three-year periods. In fact, the rate during the first year of the sequence period (74.8%) is less than one percent lower than the last year of the quarter period (75.2%).

The most dramatic contrast was found in the rates recorded between 1970-71 (the last year of the semester period) and 1971-72 (the first year of the quarter period) -- a difference of 28.5%. This, no doubt, accounts for a great deal of the dramatic overall increase recorded in the 1976 R & D report (88% compared to 68%). One can only guess why the completion rate was so low in History 17A classes during that year (50.4% compared to 81.8% in 1968-69), but, on the whole, the two calendars ran up not dissimilar completion rates in English 1A and History 17 classes.

SEQUENCE COURSES

Next, we must consider one significant difference between the two calendars, and that is the change in most sequences (usually one year) from AB to ABC, from two semesters to three quarters. Here is investigation of the completion rates is even more hazardous, as it requires examining not only class grade sheets, but individual students' grades as well. More useful, and more measurable, is the project of comparing total enrollments in selected sequences of the two calendars, and calculating how many students enrolled for the last semester (or last quarter) of the sequence. This enables us to consider also the question of whether or not an extra enrollment period each year discouraged students from completing course sequences.

For this purpose, we selected eight courses: in Business (2), Humanities (1), Natural Science (2), and Social Science (3). Each of these courses has been reshaped to maintain a similar sequence from the transition from one calendar to another calendar. Of these, some moved from a year-long semester sequence to a year-long quarter sequence (Accounting 1, Chemistry 2, History 4 and 5, and English 1); one shifted from a three-term semester sequence to a one-year quarter sequence (Physics 1ABC); and one changed from a one-year semester sequence to a two-quarter sequence (Economics 1).

TOTAL ENROLLMENTS FOR EIGHT SEQUENCE COURSES
In the Semester and Quarter Calendars, 1968-74

Semester, 1968-71		Quarter, 1971-74			
Course	Enrollments	Course	Enrollments	Difference	% Change
Business 1AB	338	Business 1ABC	323	-15	-4.4%
Chemestry 2AB	79	Chemistry 2ABC	153	74	93.7%
Economics 1AB	125	Economics 1, 2	104	-21	-16.8%
English 1AB	1,040	English 1ABC*	996	-44	-4.2%
History 4AB	269	History 4ABC	140	-129	-48.0%
History 5AB	85	History 5AB	105	30	35.3%
History 17AB	1,320	History 17, 18	1,281	-39	-3.0%
Physics 1ABC	63	Physics 1ABC	81	18	28.6%
Totals	3,319	Totals	3,183	-250	-7.5%

CARRY-THROUGH ENROLLMENTS IN EIGHT SEQUENCE COURSES
In the Semester and Quarter Calendars, 1968-79
(From first to last course in sequence)

Semester, 1968-71				Quarter, 1971-74				
Course	First	Last	%	Course	First	Last	%	% Changes
Business 1AB	227	111	48.0%	Business 1ABC	207	58	28.5%	-20.0%
Chemistry 2AB	49	30	61.2%	Chemistry 2ABC	72	45	62.0%	1.7%
Economics 1AB	60	55	91.7%	Economics 1, 2	105	48	70.2%	-21.5%
English 1AB	811	279	34.4%	English 1ABC	556	184	33.1%	-1.3%
History 4AB	174	95	54.6%	History 4ABC	66	30	45.5%	-9 1%
History 5AB	44	41	93.2%	History 5ABC	34	40	180.0%	86.8%
History 17AB	1,016	304	29.9%	History 17	1,080	216	20.0%	9.9%
Physics 1ABC	43	9	20.9%	Physics 1ABC	45	16	35.6%	14.7%
Totals	2,310	884	38.3%	Totals	2,165	637	29.4%	-8.9%

*Communications 1, 2, 3 in 1971-72.

The results are mixed. That is, five of the eight lost in initial enrollments over the three-year quarter period, and four of the five lost initial enrollments from the first course in the sequence to the last. The other three increased in total enrollments (for the whole sequence) and in the rate of initial enrollments from the beginning to the end of the sequence, as compared to the same courses under the semester calendar. The biggest losers were History 4AB (Western Civilizations), which fell from 269 to 140 (a drop of 129 or 48%), and Economics 1AB (Principles of Economics), which fell from a carry-over rate of 91.7% to 70.2% (a drop of 21.5%). Other losers in absolute enrollments were Economics 1AB, from 125 to 104, a drop of 16.8%; Business 1AB (Principles of Accounting), which fell from 338 to 323, decline of 4.4%; English 1AB (English Composition), which dropped from 1,040 enrollments to 996, a decrease of 4.2%; and History 17AB (U.S. History), which decreased from 1,320 to 1,281, a fall of 3%.

The three gainers were Chemistry 1ABC (General College Chemistry), History 5ABC (Modern Europe) and Physics 1ABC (General College Physics), which increased by 93.7% (from 79 to 153), 23.5% (from 85 to 105) and 28.6% (from 63 to 81), respectively. Physics, of course, shortened its sequence from three semesters to three quarters.

The other losers in carry-through enrollments in sequence courses were: Business 1ABC, 20% (from 48% to 28%); History 17AB, 9.9% (from 29.9% to 20%); History 4ABC, 9.1% (from 54.6% to 45.5%); and English 1AB, 1.3% (from 34.4% to 33.1%). The gainers were Chemistry 1ABC, 1.7%; History 5ABC, 86.8%; and Physics 14.7%. Notwithstanding the temporary gain, History 5ABC joined History 4ABC in dropping the C course from the sequence.

Overall, the enrollment dropped in all classes from 3,319 to 3,183, a decrease of 4.3%, and the carry-over enrollment rate fell from 38.3% to 29.4%, a decline of 8.9%. We conclude that sequence courses suffered significant decreases in initial enrollments and carry-over enrollments in the transition from the semester to the quarter calendars.

ENROLLMENT IN EIGHT SEQUENCE COURSES IN SEMESTER AND QUARTER CALENDARS, 1968-71, COMPARED

Course	1968-69				1969-70				1970-71				Totals			
	1A	1B	Total	%	1A	1B	Total	%	1A	1B	Total	%	1A	1B	Total	%
Business	75	25	100	33.3%	58	37	95	63.8%	94	49	143	52.1%	227	111	338	48.9%
Economics	21	24	45	114.3%	30	19	49	63.3%	19	12	31	63.2%	55	60	125	91.7%
English	185	61	196	33.0%	171	61	332	23.7%	355	157	512	44.2%	279	811	1,040	34.4%
Chemistry	17	15	32	88.3%	32	15	47	46.9%	Not offered ----------				30	49	79	61.8%
	4A	4B	Total	%	4A	4B	Total	%	4A	4B	Total	%	4A	4B	Total	%
History	109	28	137	25.7%	21	49	70	233.3%	44	18	62	40.9%	174	95	85	54.6%
	5A	5B	Total	%	5A	5B	Total	%	5A	5B	Total	%	5A	5B	Total	%
History	Not offered ----------				27	19	46	70.4%	17	22	39	129.4%	41	44	85	93.2%
	17A	17B	Total	%	17A	17B	Total	%	17A	17B	Total	%	17A	17B	Total	%
History	188	235	423	125.0%	344	42	386	12.2%	484	27	511	5.6%	1,016	304	1,320	29.9%

	1A	1B	1C	Total	%	1A	1B	1C	Total	%	1A	1B	1C	Total	%	1A	1B	1C	Total	%
Physics	13	8	6	27	46.2%	0	3	2	5	66.7%	30	0	1	31	3.3%	43	0	9	49	20.9%

ENROLLMENT IN EIGHT SEQUENCE COURSES IN QUARTER CALENDAR 1971 - 1974 COMPARED

	1971-72					1972-73					1973-74					Totals				
Course	1A	1B	1C	Total	%	1A	1B	1C	Total	%	1A	1B	1C	Total	%	1A	1B	1C	Total	%
Business	27	15	11	53	40.7%	76	43	12	131	15.8%	104	0	35	139	33.7%	207	58	58	323	28.0%
Chemistry	26	21	15	62	57.7%	19	15	12	46	63.2%	27	0	18	45	66.7%	72	36	45	153	62.5%
Economics	23	8		31	34.8%	34	20		54	58.8%	49	0		49	0.0%	106	28		134	26.4%
	1	3	3	Total	%	1A	1B	1C	Total	%	1A	1B	1C	Total	%	1A	1B	1C	Total	%
English*	259	104	83	446	32.0%	125	37	36	198	28.8%	172	116	65	353	37.8%	556	257	184	997	33.1%
	4A	4B	4C	Total	%	4A	4B	4C	Total	%	4A	4B	4C	Total	%	4A	4B	4C	Total	%
History	50	44	20	114	40.0%	42	7	0	49	0.0%	16	0	10	26	62.5%	174	51	95	320	45.5%
	5A	5B	5C	Total	%	5A	5B	5C	Total	%	5A	5B	5C	Total	%	5A	5B	5C	Total	%
History	Not Offered ----------					19	16	13	48	68.4%	Not Offered ----------					19	16	13	48	68.4%
	17		18	Total	%	17		18	Total	%	17		18	Total	%	17		18	Total	%
History	453		14	467	3.1%	282		95	377	33.7%	345		62	407	18.0%	1,080		216	1,296	20.0%
	1A	1B	1C	Total	%	1A	1B	1C	Total	%	1A	1B	1C	Total	%	1A	1B	1C	Total	%
Physics	30	8	9	47	30.0%	15	12	7	34	46.7%	Not Offered ----------					45	20	16	62	37.8%

62 35.6%

*Communications 1, 2, 3 in 1971-72.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

We have not discussed another significant problem with grade sheets during the semester period. It is that the withdrawals recorded in the final grade sheet did not make a distinction between students withdrawn between first and second census and those between second census and the end of the semester. That is, there is no way of knowing how many students who were dropped in time for the first census were carried over to the final grade sheet. The problem first came to attention by the discovery on each grade sheet of the machine-recorded withdrawals and hand-recorded withdrawals (for spring and fall, 1970 and spring of 1971). Which of the machine-recorded (which means, of course, recorded sometime prior to the issuance of final grade sheets to the instructor) withdrawals is the researcher to count?

But there is more. While the simpler and less detailed grade sheets of fall, 1969, do not present this difficulty, those for fall 1968 and spring 1969 pose the same difficulty as mentioned above in a different form. Those sheets had space for grading class work prior to final grades, and here a puzzling thing appears. A number of students whose records indicate they took no exams at all were awarded Ws. One might well conclude that these students were not in attendance a good deal of the time, if at all. That is, while drop dates vary from early to late in the semester for these students who did not work upon which to

base a grade, they are all considered withdrawals. Here we have reason to wonder how many of them were, in fact, " no shows" who did not inform the instructor or the instructor waited for a long time after first census to drop them from the class. When we consider, again, that the purge period was proportionately shorter than the purge period of the quarter, we have more reason to wonder how many of these are actually "No Shows" in the sense they would be so regarded by the college now.

The assumption that all of the previously recorded withdrawals (as distinguished from those recorded on the final grade sheet) in the last three terms of the semester period were No Shows would be highly questionable. But that a significant portion of them might be is certainly tenable and provides a useful means by which to compare completion rates under the two calendars. A much stronger case can be made for including most of the withdrawals during 1968-69 as the evidence is quite strong that the students in question were not "actually enrolled," as we say today, for then English Composition and/or American History classes. I suggest that one-half of all Ws during the three-year semester period represents a close approximation to the actual number of students who withdrew after the first census.

If we build the 50% withdrawal factor into the semester figures, we obtain 673 completions, instead of 609, which is a rate of 80.1%. In English 1A we obtain 550 completions instead of 491, which is a rate of 76.3%. Thus the completion rates for English 1A classes (or the equivalent) during both periods are identical, while the rate for semester History 17A classes is less than 2% lower than quarter classes (History 17).

One objection to the procedure might be the observation that under both systems--indeed, under any system--there are bound to be imperfections and irregularities, and individual instructors and students will make accurate record-keeping difficult, if not impossible. Now there may be no way to get all the bugs out of any calendar or reporting system; specifically, the recording of withdrawals will probably always lag behind the actual withdrawals. While it may be said that there can be no excuse for not keeping precise records, the truth is that perfect record-keeping, if it exists anywhere, is found only in heaven.

The conclusion to be drawn is that problems with record-keeping make a meaningful comparison of completion rates in two calendars extremely difficult, if not impossible. The first year of the quarter calendar was also the first year of both the data processing system and the ABC-No Credit grading system. The new data processing system served to purge no-shows more efficiently than ever before, and the new grading system was designed to discourage student withdrawals by awarding them an NC instead of a "D" or an "F."

SUMMARY

In conclusion, we draw these lessons from our study:

1. The figures in the R & D report of 1976 on retention rates between the two calendars are probably not accurate.

2. Completely comparable information on completions for the whole schedule does not exist.

3. One year under each calendar was insufficient for comparison purposes.

4. The enrollments for 1971-72 are probably not as low as the R & D report maintains.

5. The completion rates since the transition to the quarter calendar have remained pretty consistently the same.

6. The completion rates in English Composition and U.S. History classes have been fairly close to each other under both calendars.

7. Sequence courses have suffered some enrollment declines in the quarter calendar.

8. Inexactness in record-keeping under both calendars renders all conclusions drawn from comparisons highly tenuous.

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